

by Ingo Schulze
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Fiction

Water in August

Das Wasser im August

review

A beautifully observed coming-of-age novel and a subtle meditation on memory, storytelling and first love, ‘Water in August’ sees one of Germany’s most accomplished novelists return to the East Germany that has shaped so much of his work.

A celebrated writer returns to rural Mecklenburg to give a reading from an unfinished novella at the birthday celebration of a former schoolmate. The story he has chosen to read takes him – and his audience – back to the summer of 1979, when, as sixteen-year-old Thomas, he spent the holidays with a bohemian couple of artists in the GDR. Encouraged to look more closely at the world around him, Thomas begins to discover painting, literature, politics and desire in equal measure. He falls hopelessly in love with Sonja, an intelligent older woman whose warmth and apparent openness offer him a glimpse of adulthood. Their encounters, from long conversations to a transformative day in the Hanseatic city of Stralsund, awaken in him not only romantic longing but also a lifelong fascination with beauty, art and the possibilities of another life.

As Thomas’s youthful memories unfold, the present-day narrative quietly unsettles everything the reader thinks they know. Among those listening to the reading is the real-life Sonja, now an elderly woman, who gradually reveals that the author’s carefully crafted version of events is only one possible truth. Her recollections cast new light on the relationship, exposing the gulf between adolescent

idealisation and adult experience. ‘Water in August’ is a moving exploration of the stories we tell ourselves about our lives, and the ways memory is shaped, edited and transformed by time.

Schulze writes with characteristic elegance and emotional precision, capturing both the exhilaration of intellectual awakening and the melancholy of looking back. The novel’s framing structure allows past and present to illuminate one another without ever feeling contrived, while its richly evoked East German setting provides more than historical background. This is a world in which literature, art and political debate carry an intensity born of restriction and longing. Schulze’s beautifully paced novel continually invites readers to question where autobiography ends and fiction begins.

Following the success of *New Lives* (tr. John E. Woods, Knopf/Vintage, 2008), *Simple Stories* (tr. John E. Woods, Picador, 2000) and *Adam and Evelyn* (tr. John E. Woods, Knopf/Macmillan, 2011), Schulze once again demonstrates his remarkable ability to combine intimate personal stories with larger questions of history and memory. ‘Water in August’ will appeal to readers of Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Kairos* and Rachel Cusk’s *Outline* trilogy for its insightful reflections on first love, memory and the stories we tell ourselves about the past.

Find out more:
https://www.fischerverlage.de/verlag/rights/book/ingo-schulze-das-wasser-im-august-9783103971668

about the author

Ingo Schulze was born in Dresden in 1962 and lives in Berlin. His books, including *Simple Stories* (*Simple Stories* tr. John E. Woods, Picador, 2000), *Neue Leben* (*New Lives* tr. John E. Woods, Knopf/Vintage, 2008), *Adam und Evelyn* (*Adam and Evelyn* tr. John E. Woods, Knopf/Macmillan, 2011), *Peter Holtz* (2017) and *Die rechtschaffenden Mörder* ‘The righteous murderers’ (2020), have been hugely successful, and are on school reading lists, have been made into films and translated into 32 languages. Ingo Schulze has received numerous national and international awards for his work. He has been President of the German Academy for Language and Literature since 2023.

Previous works: *Der Amerikaner, der den Kolumbus zuerst*

entdeckte…, S. Fischer (2022); *Die rechtschaffenen Mörde*r, S. Fischer (2020); *Einübung ins Paradies*, Fischer Taschenbuch (2018); *Peter Holtz. Sein glückliches Leben erzählt von ihm selbst*, S. Fischer (2017); *Adam und Evelyn*, Berlin Verlag (2008); *Neue Leben. Die Jugend Enrico Türmers in Briefen und Prosa*, Berlin Verlag (2005); *Simple Storys. Ein Roman aus der ostdeutschen Provinz*, Berlin Verlag (1998); *33 Augenblicke des Glücks. Aus den abenteuerlichen Aufzeichnungen der Deutschen in Piter*, Berlin Verlag (1995).

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S. Fischer Verlag (Germany)
Hedderichstrasse 114
60596 Frankfurt am Main

Contact: Elisa Diallo

foreignrights@fischerverlage.de